



News Release

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Whooping cough cases in our state highest in six years

New recommendation for pregnant women can help protect more babies

OLYMPIA — Whooping cough is a growing problem in our state, with the number of cases increasing by more than 50 percent between 2010 and 2011. There were 912 cases for 2011 — the highest in six years. There were 608 cases reported in 2010. In recent years, adolescents and adults have accounted for an increasing proportion of cases.

“The number of reported cases is just the tip of the iceberg,” says State Health Officer and pediatrician Dr. Maxine Hayes. “Many young people and adults who get pertussis may not know they have it and don’t seek medical attention.”

[Whooping cough](http://www.doh.wa.gov/cfh/Immunize/diseases/pertussis) (www.doh.wa.gov/cfh/Immunize/diseases/pertussis), also known as pertussis, is a highly contagious respiratory illness spread by coughing and sneezing. It affects people of all ages — but is most serious in infants, especially those too young to get vaccinated or who aren’t fully protected. It causes cold-like symptoms followed by a [long, severe cough](#) (www.pkids.org/diseases/pertussis.html) that can last for weeks. Adolescents and adults often get a much milder case of whooping cough, but they can still spread it.

A new recommendation from the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices calls for pregnant women to get pertussis vaccine (Tdap) later in pregnancy (after 20 weeks’ gestation). Women who get Tdap vaccine before or during pregnancy pass on extra protection against pertussis to their babies. It’s important for anyone who takes care of or has close contact with babies to get pertussis vaccine, ideally at least two weeks before beginning close contact with the infant. This includes siblings of infants who should be up-to-date on DTaP and other recommended immunizations.

Tdap vaccine is available for adolescents and adults through age 64. Adults 65 and older who expect to have close contact with babies younger than 12 months should get a dose of Tdap to help protect the baby from pertussis. Health care workers of all ages who have contact with infants should get vaccinated too.

Most people get a series of pertussis vaccines when they're kids, but protection wears off over time. The Department of Health recommends people substitute a Tdap vaccine for one routine tetanus (Td) booster, which is needed every 10 years; people should get it sooner if they're in close contact with young kids or live in an area where there are pertussis cases. There's no minimum time period between getting Td and Tdap vaccines. Only one Tdap vaccine is recommended in a person's lifetime.

All recommended vaccines are offered to all kids under 19 at no cost through health care provider offices participating in the state's Childhood Vaccine Program. Health care providers may charge an office visit fee and a fee to give the vaccine, called an administration fee. People who cannot afford the administration fee can ask their regular health care provider to waive the cost. Adults should talk to their insurance carriers about coverage for pertussis vaccine.

More information on preventing whooping cough is available by contacting your [local health agency](#) (www.doh.wa.gov/LHJMap/LHJMap.htm) or the Department of Health's [Office of Immunization and Child Profile](#) (www.doh.wa.gov/cfh/Immunize) at 360-236-3595.

The [Department of Health website](#) (www.doh.wa.gov) is your source for *a healthy dose of information*. Also, [find us on Facebook](#) and [follow us on Twitter](#).

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